INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM INTRODUCTION

The **Incident Command System** (ICS) is a management system designed to offer a flexible response to incidents of any size. The system is designed to grow and shrink along with the incident, allowing resources to be added into or removed from the system as required.

If your water system experiences an emergency that involves other groups such as a fire department and/or law enforcement, the responders may set up an incident command system to manage the emergency response. You should know and understand how an Incident Command System (ICS) operates. For more information on ICS, contact your county Emergency Management Agency.

An **incident** is any type of event, caused by either humans or natural phenomena, which requires response actions to prevent or minimize loss of life or damage to property and/or the environment. ICS is interdisciplinary and organizationally flexible to meet management challenges and can:

- Meet the needs of incidents of any kind or size;
- Allow personnel from various groups to join quickly into a common management structure;
- Provide logistical and administrative support to operational staff; and
- Be cost effective by avoiding duplication of efforts.

ICS consists of procedures for controlling personnel, facilities, equipment, and communications. It is a system designed to be used or applied from the time an incident occurs until the requirement for management and operations no longer exists.

Organization

Each section of ICS can be divided into sub-sections as needed, allowing ICS to grow and shrink along with the incident. A person at the top of the command structure is the responsible party until the task is delegated. This allows one or few people to handle small incidents, or many people working on different tasks control large incidents. The major management activities are made up of five sections.

- **Command** - single person in charge at the incident, initially fills all five command staff positions and delegates tasks to Section Chiefs as the incident grows. Responsible for all activity as well as creating the overall incident objectives. **Public Information Officer, Safety Officer** and **Liaison Officer** report directly to Incident Commander.
- **Operations** - directs all actions to meet the incident objectives.
- **Planning** - collects and displays incident information, mainly the status of all resources and overall status of the incident.
- **Logistics** - provides all resources, services, and support.
- **Finance/Administration** - tracks related costs, personnel records, request, and contracts required by Logistics.

Chain of Command

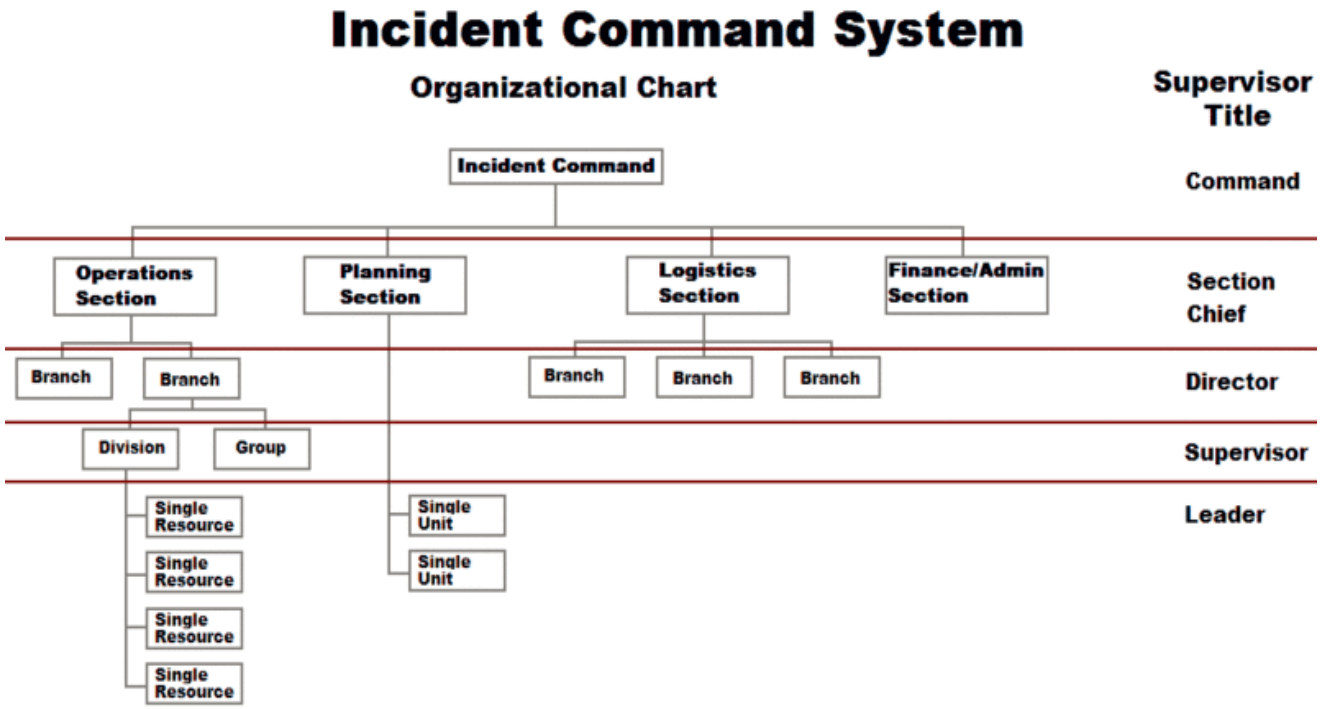
Every person on the incident has a designated supervisor. There is a clear line of authority within the organization. The command function may be carried out in two ways:

- **Single Command** - Incident Commander has complete responsibility for incident management. A Single Command may be simple, involving an Incident Commander and single resources, or it may be a complex organizational structure with an Incident Management Team; or
- **Unified Command** - responders share incident management. May be needed for incidents involving multiple jurisdictions, a single jurisdiction with multiple agencies sharing responsibility, or multiple jurisdictions with multi-agency involvement. A single, coordinated Incident Action Plan directs all activities. The Incident Commanders will supervise a single Command and General Staff organization and speak with one voice.

The Chain of Command follows an organizational structure which adds layers of command as needed. A role of responsibility may be transferred as the incident grows or reduces in size, if the incident moves locations or area of responsibility, or if there is normal turnover of personnel due to extended incidents.

The basic outline of command layers is:

- Command
- Sections
- Branches
- Divisions/Groups
- Units
- Resources



Span of Control: limits the number of responsibilities being handled by, and the number of resources reporting directly to, an individual. ICS considers that any single person's span of control should be between three and seven, with five being ideal.

Incident Action Plan (IAP): for the specific event, the response is coordinated and managed through one plan of action. The IAP can be verbal or written (hazardous material incidents must have written IAP), and is prepared by the Planning Section.

All Incident Action Plans must at least have these four elements:

- What do we want to do?
- Who is responsible for doing it?
- How do we communicate with each other?
- What is the procedure if someone is injured?

Management by Objective: The Incident Commander and Planning Section are responsible for the development of Strategic Objectives. Objectives must be *S*pecific, *M*easurable, *A*chievable, *R*elevant, and *T*ime-based (S.M.A.R.T).

Unity of Command: each individual participating in the operation reports to only one supervisor. Unity of Command also means that that all personnel are managed and accounted for.

Modular Organization: means that the size and focus of the ICS organization depends on the magnitude of the incident, and the system can be expanded or contracted as necessary. The level of response necessary for a specific incident dictates how and when the organization develops.

Comprehensive Resource Management: is a key management principle that means that all assets and personnel during an event need to be tracked and accounted for. Comprehensive Resource Management ensures that resources can be moved quickly to support the preparation and response to an incident. Comprehensive resource management also classifies resources by kind and type, and categorizes resources by their status.

- **In Transit resources** are dispatched to, but not yet checked-in at an incident scene.
- **Assigned resources** are working on a field assignment under the direction of a supervisor.
- **Available resources** are ready for deployment, but have not been given a field assignment.
- **Out-of-service resources** are not in either the "available" or "assigned" categories. Resources can be "out-of-service" for a variety of reasons, including a shortfall in staffing, personnel on break, maintenance, weather, demobilization, or others.

Common terminology and Clear text

Common terminology is an essential element in team building and communications for everyone responding to an incident. ICS promotes the use of common terminology and has a glossary of terms that help bring consistency titles, descriptions and many other subjects.

Clear text communications is critical in an effective multi-agency incident management system. All communications must be in plain English. This means that radio codes, agency-specific codes and jargon are not used.

Integrated Communications: The use of a common communications plan is essential for ensuring that responders can communicate with one another during an incident. Communication equipment, procedures, and systems must operate across jurisdictions (interoperability). Developing an integrated voice and data communications system, including equipment, systems, and protocols, must occur prior to an incident.

Effective ICS communications include three elements:

- Modes: The "hardware" systems that transfer information.
- Planning: Planning for the use of all available communications resources.
- Networks: The procedures and processes for transferring information.

Safety: For Emergency services, any incident will have a designated Safety Officer. For smaller incidents this can be a role taken on by the Incident Commander, but for most incidents the Safety Officer is a separate person. The Safety Officer is the only person allowed to move in and out of the chain of command and issue orders to resources not directly his subordinate.

Accountability: required at all levels and within individual functional areas. Individuals follow their agency policies and guidelines and any applicable local, tribal, State, or Federal rules and regulations. Personnel also follow these guidelines:

- **Check-In** - All responders must report in to receive assignments following procedures established by the Incident Commander;
- **Incident Action Plan** - Response operations are directed and coordinated as outlined in the IAP;
- **Unity of Command** - Each individual is assigned to only one supervisor;
- **Span of Control** - Supervisors must be able to adequately supervise and control their personnel, as well as communicate with and manage all resources under their supervision; and
- **Resource Tracking** - Supervisors must record and report resource status changes as they occur.

Pre-Designated Incident Facilities: Response operations include response personnel working at different and often separate incident facilities. These facilities can include:

- **Incident Command Post** (ICP): The ICP is the location where the Incident Commander operates during response operations. The ICP is outside of the present and potential hazard zone but close enough to the incident to maintain command.
- **A Staging Area** is where tactical response resources are stored while they await assignment. Resources in staging area are under the control of the Logistics Section and are always in available status.
- A **Base** is where primary logistics and administrative functions are coordinated and administered. The Base is established and managed by the Logistics Section. The resources in the Base are always out-of-service.
- **Camps** are locations equipped and staffed to provide sleeping, food, water, sanitation, and other services to response personnel that are too far away to use base facilities. Camps are designated by geographic location or number.
- A **Helibase** is where helicopter-centered air operations are conducted.
- **Helispots** are locations where helicopters can safely land and take off.